

Norwich City Council

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BRIEFING PAPER for meeting to be held on 11 February 2010

Community Engagement Strategy – Monitoring of Process

Purpose: The scrutiny committee is asked to Identify any causes for concern and note successes while evaluating the Strategy's impact.

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Community Engagement Strategy – Monitoring of Progress

Background

1. The development of a community engagement strategy was recognised as phase 1 of the delivery of the neighbourhood strategy which was approved by the Executive in February 2008. The community engagement strategy was developed in consultation with communities a wide of engagement tools to elicit comment and involvement from communities across the city and was agreed in May 2009 incorporating feedback from individuals and communities.
2. This approach acknowledged and worked within the code of practice for consultations with voluntary sector organisations under the Norfolk Compact.

What did we set out to do?

3. This community engagement strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision-making and enable us to improve public services to enhance quality of life across Norwich. By this we mean:
 - **strong communities**, who can form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns
 - **active communities**, where people are supported to improve quality of life in their own communities
 - **inclusive communities**, where all sections of the community feel they have opportunities to be involved in decision-making and influence public services

What are our objectives?

4. The objectives below identify how we can contribute to the council's vision and ensure that the community engagement strategy delivers an effective and coordinated approach to community engagement for the benefit of all citizens and the diverse communities of Norwich. We will:
 - **strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities** for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities
 - provide opportunities for communities to **shape and influence** the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities

- **manage and coordinate** engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality and partner participation and avoid duplication
 - ensure that community engagement activities **provide opportunities** for participation for all sections of the community, particularly people and groups that are often missed out of community engagement activities
 - listen to communities and ensure **feedback** to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement
 - **listen and learn** from our own and others' experience and share community engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision-making.
5. We will have been successful in implementing our community engagement strategy if we can show how we have developed the ways we work better together with citizens and communities including how we've:

- kept citizens informed
- consulted citizens
- involved citizens to influence our services
- how we've worked together (partnerships)
- how we've supported independent community initiatives

which are reflected in the seven themes contained within the community engagement strategy:

- Theme 1 : understanding our communities
 - Theme 2 : improving the way we work which puts people at the heart of the service
 - Theme 3 : making sure that those communities who do not have a voice are supported to be involved in the best possible way
 - Theme 4 : supporting and developing tenant involvement in the council's housing service
 - Theme 5 : supporting and developing locally managed community centres and facilities
 - Theme 6 : promoting involvement including supporting new ways to be involved and have a voice
 - Theme 7 : supporting communities to do it for themselves.
6. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this work in the future will impact on the national performance indicators including:
- The percentage of adults who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area NI 4
 - The percentage of adults who feel their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds can get on well together NI 1

- The percentage of adults who feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood NI 2

Or where we can evidence the following:

- more community activity in neighbourhoods
 - services are improved as a result of community engagement
 - place survey indicators are improving, in particular:
7. The approach will also be assessed as part of the comprehensive area assessment where the Audit Commission will test the duty to involve through an assessment of:
 - Councils and partners engagement with their communities and understanding needs of the vulnerable and marginalised groups
 - The extent of involvement of communities in defining priority outcomes and assessing whether outcomes have been achieved
 - The effectiveness of local partners activities in coordinating community engagement and communicating its impact on their decisions
 8. As the place survey was being undertaken at the time the work on the community engagement strategy was progressing it is proposed to use the findings to act as a benchmark for monitoring impact.

What have we done/been achieved?

9. The community engagement strategy forms part of a “making a difference – talking and listening” framework which shapes how service areas consider how they put the customer/community at the heart of the service and show what has changed as a result. It also helps achieve a more consistent approach to this work.
10. Community engagement is a relatively new approach which requires a change in culture of the organisation. Work is in progress and there are signs of change which illustrates that it is being embedded across the organisation. Examples include:
 - the development of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints procedure
 - customer satisfaction surveys/feedback
 - the establishment of a corporate consultation procedure and group to develop a common and consistent approach to consultation across the organisation.
11. Further work is needed to not only maintain this momentum but to build on it and ensure that it becomes fully embedded across the whole organisation.

12. The community engagement team have supported teams where new or additional skills are required. There has also been particular activity to respond to the Housing Service and Planning Service Improvement plans.
13. The following are examples which indicate some of the activity which has been undertaken over the past few months and to reflect some of the progress made against the themes.

Theme 1 - understanding our communities

14. The Council at times uses a range of different terms to describe who it should engage with including community, public, citizen, customer, resident, tenant, leaseholder, individual, group and stakeholder. Irrespective of the word used the principle is the same, do we understand who our services are for and are these services meeting their needs? Therefore we need to understand who our customers are what are their needs and expectations if the services are to be the right services and delivered in the right way.
15. To have a better understanding of their customers, the customer contact team, housing services and planning services have been gathering customer profiling information.
16. Housing Services are in the process of building their customer profile which will:
 - increase their knowledge of the demographic make up of their tenants/leaseholders and ultimately the needs of their tenants/leaseholders
 - to identify gaps in provision or specific needs which require a different approach.
17. Residents have indicated that they want to have clear information and an understanding of what they expect from a service. Customer Contact has used the information on their customers to help inform the setting of their service standards and have promoted this using a variety of mechanisms. The development of service standards across the Council is seen as a priority.
18. The community engagement team have developed community profile data which identifies community activity that is taking place across the city. This enables staff to build connections with those groups, provide local information or help targeting of resources where gaps in provision are known. There has been a noticeable increase in requests from the public including agencies and organisations for what is happening on the ground

and provision of contact information. It is intended that this profile data will initially be used to provide spatial information for staff.

Theme 2 - improving the way we work which puts people at the heart of the service

19. The change in culture required to put people at the heart of the service has been supported by the embedding of “We are Listening” - Compliments, Comments and Complaints process across the organisation. The rollout of a single approach requires staff to indicate what has happened as a result of a complaint. This gives us a much better understanding of the needs of people and what difference it has made to them and to the service we provide. Feedback is something which people clearly felt was needed from the council on issues that affected them.
20. The development of a council wide approach to consultations saw the establishment of the council consultation group which coordinates all consultation work and has led to a standardised approach and an improvement in quality across the organisation.
21. A toolkit for consultation has been developed and further work is required to:
 - encourage staff to use alternative approaches
 - develop feedback mechanisms
 - embed the approach to ensure that there is a consistent and co-ordinated approach to consultations which reports on how it has made a difference as a result of what local people say.
22. The development of local community plans which reflect the local residents voice, identifies what is happening in a given community including the facilities that exist, the communities concerns, aspirations and priorities are in development. The actioning planning will take place through the new neighbourhood teams which will help inform their work and the shaping of future corporate and service planning priorities.
23. The planning service improvement plan recognises the need to develop a range of different mechanisms to consult that will widen involvement. This has been seen in the following work areas:
 - Sewell conservation area
 - The Local Development Framework Site allocations
 - Statement of community involvement
 - St Stephen’s Masterplan
 - Northern Area Action Plan
 - Greater Norwich Development Partnership

24. In Catton Grove a multi-agency and community project streetscape project undertook an extensive door to door survey to gauge public perception of street services within the Catton area and effectiveness of their delivery. Residents were also asked to consider how they perceived their neighbourhood and their own level of involvement within it. This led to a week of action highlighting a range of council and partner services within the area and was successful in identifying community need and those within the community willing to take action and get involved.

25. Examples of where changes have already been made as a result of putting people at the heart of the service include:

- The council's main telephone number being changed from an 08 to 03 number and changes to range of telephone options as a result of what people said
- The use of focus groups to obtain resident views on particular work streams including the re-let of the city care contracts, housing tenant involvement, annual rent consultation.
- Identification of key priorities for the Economic Strategy Action Plan.
- Development of play provision across the city including the Jenny Lind Park which was described by the Executive as good practice; St Clements Park which attracted £100k funding from Big Lottery and Lea Bridges Park which gave children a voice in redeveloping the space.

Theme 3 - making sure that those communities who do not have a voice are supported to be involved in the best possible way

26. A range of activities and projects have been developed over the past year which have meant there has been an increase in ways that communities have a voice. Progress includes

- The Norwich Older People's Forum providing new opportunity to be involved with the council and have a voice.
- An established Equalities Forum which provides the council with an insight into our diversity impact assessments as well as opportunity to consult with them on other policies and procedures. The group is made up of local people who come from a range of backgrounds which reflect the 6 equality strands. They do not represent an organisation but rather as an individual can provide a first hand perspective.
- Information, advice and guidance given to service areas on range of consultation and engagement methodologies which recognises the diversity of communities as well as barriers to involvement i.e. community engagement team's involvement in Planning Service Improvement Plan Customer Focus Group (Hard to Reach), trialling use of facebook to engage with different audience (primarily younger people) during consultation on piloting 20mph speed limit areas.
- Targeted consultations – for instance attending Asylum Voice Christmas Party to find out what did they value about the area they

lived in, what was important to them in recognition that as a group of people they would not access the more generic type of consultation activity. Attending the Norwich Pride event. Whilst the feedback will be used to inform the development of community/neighbourhood plans it also provided the basis for future networking opportunities.

- Work of the community engagement team undertaken within communities to raise awareness and understanding of the needs of diverse communities, how a group can respond to this including their own practice.
- Rolling out a programme of equality and diversity training for all council staff to raise awareness and understanding of the role each of us have in supporting this agenda.
- Change in expectations of council contractors to meet the equality standards required which have been embedded into the new contract re-let.

27. There is an understanding that one size does not fit all and that there are changes we can make which make a big difference to the individual/community.

28. The establishment of city wide fora needs to be supported as well as continuation of targeted activity to ensure that the voice of marginalised/minority/vulnerable communities is captured.

Theme 4 - supporting and developing tenant involvement in the council's housing service

29. As a result of the audit commission inspection reports and the resulting housing improvement programme, tenant engagement, influence and consultations have been a key area of work across the housing service. Changes which have been put in place include:

- resident representatives on the Housing Improvement Board to deliver service improvements.
- tenants and leaseholders involved in the awarding of the new repairs and maintenance contracts and continued to work with residents and leaseholders through the City Wide Board, and it's working sub groups for performance and publications.
- the Tenant compact and the Leaseholder Compact are being revised with tenants and leaseholders involvement
- joint briefing sessions for Councillors, staff and residents around service improvements
- sponsored tenants to attend staff training on voids
- sponsored tenants and staff to attend external events (Cambridge community day)
- commissioned a tenants panel of 1,000 residents and 200 leaseholders to provide profiled, independent feedback on service improvements
- agreed a Tenant Approved logo process "tenant tick" with City Wide Board

- tenants and leaseholders consulted on our Blueprint, ASB guides, rent strategy etc. The feedback has resulted in changes to the proposals.
- provided feedback on those changes to the tenants and leaseholders who provided the feedback
- implemented changes to our procedures as a direct result to complaints and customer feedback (recording of data in home options, rent records, etc)
- Supported existing Tenant Resident Association groups including offering guidance to the committee
- Promoting opportunities to get involved within the local communities and supporting tenants to be active participants in tenant involvement activity.

Theme 5 - supporting and developing locally managed community centres and facilities

30. The council has 15 locally managed centres across the city and the community engagement team provide an ongoing first point of contact for advice and guidance support. During the year we have responded on an individual group basis to issues and concerns regarding the management of the building and role of the community associations. The range of activity has included responding to issues ranging from conflict resolution, financial management, fund raising and group governance and committee development.
31. Owing to the local knowledge that the community engagement officer has on the ground they have been able to introduce new people into community groups who are keen to get involved in their community. In many cases community associations often struggle to find new volunteers to replace outgoing members which can result in people committing many hours above and beyond their original intention. However, this issue is not exclusive to this type of voluntary activity and can be seen to be an issue across many community and voluntary organisations.
32. The range of work to support community centres includes:
- Supporting Cadge Road community association to evidence funders requirements for a grant programme
 - Supporting a new committee at West Earlham community association to understand their roles and responsibilities of managing a public building, to plan for and turn improve the group finances as well as fund raise for a new kitchen
 - Supporting groups weather a down turn in bookings
 - Co-ordinated the provision of fire safety training
 - Supported user group consultations to evidence need for energy efficiency improvements for funding applications.

Theme 6 - promoting involvement including supporting new ways to be involved and have a voice

33. There has been a range of activity including:

- Organised events during Local Democracy Week which were aimed at encouraging young people and people with learning difficulties to have a better understanding of local government and the services offered
- The use of the Planning for Real engagement tool to engage with local people has provide a way which gives everyone the opportunity to contribute. The tool is designed to prevent anyone, or a specific issue, to dominate and seeks to identify issues, priorities, as well as in the future to, plan action to resolve issues using consensus.
- Your Neighbourhood Your Decision - a pilot participatory budgeting project for Norwich in three neighbourhoods
- Setting up and development of a Home Watch project
- Setting up and development of a number of community garden projects
- Supporting the development of an allotments association
- Developed a community engagement page on the council's website
- Using in-depth focus groups to look at a range of topics covering there-let of the city care contracts which resulted in positive feedback from the participants

Theme 7 - supporting communities to do it for themselves

34. There is a range of activity that is undertaken within communities across the city to develop the capacity and confidence particularly with regard to this theme. This works is very much individual or community group led and requires the community engagement officer to build trust with local people to progress. The activity ranges from the provision of information through to advice and guidance and can be for intensive periods of time. Examples of activity undertaken include:

- Group governance
 - From setting up as a new group with a constitution, etc
 - Supporting individuals in their roles on the committee (i.e. treasurer, chair, member)
 - Policies and procedures to manage a building, run an event, meet legal requirements, etc.
- Promotion/publicity
 - Development of a community newsletter group
 - Understanding of role and opportunities
- Fundraising
 - From planning a project through to preparing and writing funding bids including business/management plans
- Advice and guidance on project management, funding applications bids
- Volunteer recruitment and support
- Capacity building

- Encourage local residents to attend (or be actively involved) at SNAP/Safer Neighbourhood Team meetings to voice their concerns
- Attend locally held MP meetings to hear local concerns

The future

35. In the eight months since the adoption of the community engagement strategy, there is evidence of a change in how services are involving residents and customers in shaping the services that are being delivered.
36. This has helped to create the foundation for the work to continue within the neighbourhood management model which will be implemented from April which aims to improve further how the Council engages, listens to and empowers local communities and achieve a better shared understanding of the needs and aspirations of neighbourhoods.
37. There has been a noticeable increase in:
 - joined up work between service areas which has facilitated a wider understanding of methods of engagement as well as considerations when planning activity to reduce/remove barriers to involvement
 - an increase in contact with representatives of BME/religious groups to develop dialogue or activities.
38. Requests for the community engagement team to be involved in providing either local knowledge or a community engagement perspective are also noticeably increasing from service areas as they understand that that when residents are involved the result is a better service or project.
39. However, much more is required to extend and develop this work including:
 - The need to continue to embed community engagement and feedback across all service areas
 - The continued development of and use of a range of materials and mechanism for engagement
 - The development of community plans and action plans and their use to shape council and partners corporate and service plans and priorities
 - Evaluate and learn from the pilot participatory budgeting pilot projects
 - Develop a single involvement database which captures people's interests and level of involvement
 - Develop a mechanism to assess the impact of the implementation of the community engagement strategy using the national indicators and local measures including community development indicators
 - Improve how we work joint with partners as neighbourhood working develops over the coming months
 - Continue to understand our communities and ensure communities of interest and identify are provided with opportunities to be involved
 - Further develop the broader engagement and empowerment agenda through the roll out of neighbourhood working